

TEACHING THE PARABLES IN THE
LOCAL CHURCH USING COGNITIVE
FIELD THEORY

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AN ABSTRACT: TEACHING THE PARABLES IN THE LOCAL
CHURCH USING COGNITIVE FIELD THEORY

by
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This dissertation applies the concept of cognitive field theory to the teaching of parables. The emphasis is directed toward the pastoral ministry, particularly the pastor of a local church in the role of teacher/educator.

The first chapter begins with a short history of cognitive field theory as developed and utilized by Kurt Lewin. The major portion of the chapter overviews the major concepts of cognitive field theory which makes cognitive field theory distinctively different from other learning psychologies. These concepts are: perception and reality, purposiveness of behavior, psychological function, situational emphasis, the principle of contemporaneity, the concept of an individual's life space, the concept of a person, and the meaning of psychological environment.

The second chapter relates cognitive field theory as a viable teaching/learning method within a Christian context to the theological perspectives of Paul Tillich and John MacQuarrie. Tillich's self-world structure of being and MacQuarrie's repetitive thinking as applied to the revelatory moment provide the theological bases for the field structure of the self as well as the process of insightful learning.

The third chapter presents how the parable as language event serves as a teaching/learning medium which utilizes the principles of cognitive field theory. The parable presents the hearers with a theological insight which brings about a change of heart. The parable presents a life situation with which the hearers can readily identify. Once brought into the parable the hearer is then presented with a new possibility for his/her action. This new possibility comes to the hearer as a theological insight which the hearer, as shown by his/her previous behavior, had not recognized or accepted before. Such an insight brings the hearer to a new place in his/her psychological field, a place which requires a new orientation and new decisions. This theological insight requires an existential decision of the hearer in which the hearer must decide to accept for himself/herself the theological insight brought to him/her in the parable or whether to reject it. The Parable of the Father's Love (Prodigal Son) is presented in detail as an example of this methodology.

The final chapter explains how the pastor of a local church can more effectively serve as an educator through the use of cognitive field theory. By engaging his/her people in the biblical story at the point where the story makes contact with them, the pastor is then enabled to bring his hearers to a new point of learning by presenting his hearers with important data that can help them understand the life situation of the people who first heard the story or parable. In such a fashion the theological message of the story or parable can be heard today in today's life situation. The pastor in such a situation is expected to serve as the biblical scholar in bringing to bear the latest in biblical scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM

The concern of Christian Education is the development of the whole person. A person's relationship with God extends the whole range of his being. A person is not a secular person one moment and a religious person another moment. A person is always in relationship. These relationships may be other people, the things around that person, or certain events which carry particular meaning for that person. How do these concerns relate to each other? Cognitive field theory provides a medium that helps the educator in assisting the learner to more effectively integrate himself, his environment, and his self-understanding in relationship with God.

The purpose of this dissertation is to apply the concept of cognitive field theory to the teaching of parables. The concern here is the integration of the developmental learning process within a theological framework. The importance of such a study is reflected in the local congregational life of the church. The pastor of a church fulfills many roles. One of these roles is the pastor as teacher/educator. The pastor is, in effect, the "resident theologian" in that parish. As a teacher/educator, the pastor can either encourage a person's learning

development or discourage that development within a learning situation. Three factors affect this process. They are: 1) the way the educator structures the learning environment; 2) the way the educator perceives the learner in that environment; and 3) the way the educator understands the interaction between the learner, his environment, and his relationship with God.

The limitations of this study are reflected in the importance of the study. While the local congregation is the focus of the concern of this dissertation, the local congregation is also the limit of the concern. Cognitive field theory has many possibilities in many teaching/learning situations. While the parables of the New Testament are not necessarily restricted for use only within the church, the application of cognitive field theory in teaching the message of a parable in a local congregation is the extent of the focus of concern.

How will this concern be developed? Chapter I will be a presentation of Cognitive Field Theory including the essential features of the theory, the understanding of the behavior of a person, as well as a presentation of the learning process. Chapter II will reflect cognitive field theory against several theological concerns. The approach will be an examination of the basic assumptions of the theory as they are seen in light of several major concepts

of Paul Tillich and John Macquarrie, particularly as they bear on the revelatory event in a person's life.

Chapter III will be the teaching of the parables in a dynamic teaching/learning situation. The parable becomes a medium which engages the person in reflective dialogue with God's demand for that person, and sets the stage for further encounter and development of that relationship. One parable from the synoptic gospels will be examined in detail. Chapter IV will focus upon the pastor as a teacher/educator. Through his understanding of cognitive field theory, his effectiveness can be increased by his careful and compassionate understanding of the people who come in relationship with him as learners. This becomes the hermeneutic task, that of translating the biblical event into a continuing present-day encounter between persons and God.

DEFINITION OF IMPORTANT TERMS

Cognitive field theory utilizes several terms which are borrowed from scientific disciplines. Because precision in measurement is not of utmost importance in cognitive field theory (as is the case in science), these terms are felt to need a "broadened" definition.

Topology - a non-metrical geometry which encompasses concepts such as inside, outside, and boundary. The concern is not with fixed distances and positions of figures, but with the relative position of the geometric figures being considered.

Vector - a concept equivalent to a psychological force.

Life space - a model whereby people can be studied psychologically. A "life space" contains the whole of one's psychological reality, one's self and what one makes of what one gains from one's physical and social environment. It includes everything that is needed in order to understand a person's concrete behavior in a specific psychological environment at a certain time.

Insight - getting the feel of a matter, grasping the idea, catching onto or seeing through a situation.

Cognitive - from the Latin verb "cognoscere", which means "to know"; based upon or capable of being reduced to empirical factual knowledge.

Field - consists of the concurrent interrelationships in any one situation. A field is not described in objective terms but in perceptual terms.

Valence - the value or quality associated with an object or an area in an individual's psychological field. Valence is usually denoted as positive or negative.

CHAPTER I

COGNITIVE FIELD THEORY

A. KURT LEWIN: FOUNDER OF COGNITIVE FIELD THEORY

Cognitive field theory developed from the work of Kurt Lewin. Kurt Lewin was born in Germany in 1890. He received his doctorate from the University of Berlin, where he later became professor of psychology and philosophy. In 1932 he came to the United States. His teaching posts included Stanford, Cornell and Iowa Universities. In 1944 Lewin became director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Lewin never formalized his social psychology in published textbook form; his personal influence upon students and colleagues and his many monographs and articles were his preferred means of expression. His three books of selected papers greatly enhance the social science field. They are: Field Theory in Social Science (1951); Resolving Social Conflicts (1948); and A Dynamic Theory of Personality (1935).

Congruent with Lewin's philosophy that there is no substitute for a good theory, cognitive field psychology stands as his unique contribution to the field of learning. The center of Lewin's psychological interest was in the motivating conditions of person-environment situations.

Lewin wanted his "field psychology" to be fundamentally different from the various Stimulus-Response Associationisms which were popular in the late 19th century. Instead of approaching psychology as the study of a series of events which were connected by links or bonds in a person's psychological framework, Lewin felt that the very term "field" implied that, psychologically speaking, everything happens at once. To grasp the dynamics of the field situation, Lewin's method of field psychology involved topological and vector psychology.

B. MAJOR CONCEPTS OF COGNITIVE FIELD THEORY

Cognitive field psychology utilizes several major concepts which make it distinctive from other psychologies. These concepts are perception and reality, purposiveness of behavior, psychological function, situational emphasis, the principle of contemporaneity, the concept of an individual's life space, the concept of a person, and the meaning of psychological environment.

Perception and Reality.

The first concept which will be investigated is the meaning of perception and reality. A cognitive field psychologist understands the environment of a person to be composed of things and situations. He also understands the person to be in a state of constant interaction with these

things and situations. The person is said to be interrelating with his environment. This continuing interaction results in a changing perception of himself and the things in his environment. This process is what is meant by relativism or interactionism. Relativism means that nothing in one's environment can be experienced as a thing in itself, but only as it relates to other things. Therefore, a person's perception is his interrelating with the things in his environment. The reality of a person consists of what he makes of the things that he perceives. The meaning which a person gives to a particular object in an environment arises from the interpretation of the relationship between the object and the individual. The meaning of something then becomes a matter of how a person sizes up what he receives from his environment.

Experiments have been performed which indicate that nothing is absolute in perception. Depending on the characteristic insights or understandings a person brings to a situation, the meaning of a thing or an occasion vary with those insights. An experiment was set up so that a person

viewed two different pictures through a stereoscope. One set of stereograms consisted of pairs of small photographs of football players, one to be viewed by the right eye, the other by the left. There was enough similarity in the pairs of pictures for a subject to get binocular fusion. However, when a person looked into the stereoscope and described the face he saw, it was neither of the faces represented by the photographs. Instead, he described a new and different face, usually made

up of the dominant features of both faces he was viewing with separate eyes.¹

This relativism in "seeing" can be examined on a strict social level as well. Children in a classroom with one teacher will act quite differently when another teacher is in the same classroom with the same children.

Reality includes one's self-image. Since reality is relativistically defined as consisting of that which one gains through his senses and his manner of sizing it up, one's self-image is what he makes of himself, and his environment consists of what he makes of that which surrounds him.² A field psychologist avoids terms and concepts which imply fixed traits or rigid habits in defining personalities. Truth is therefore tentative and instrumental, but not final, and dogmatic statements about the nature of man and the universe are avoided. Rather, "a statement is considered true because of its accuracy in prediction and the consensus of people competent in its area in regard to the possible consequences of acting on it."³ Such a relativistic understanding of truth in no way discounts the value of truths. Rather, it means that truth is considered in a more discerning manner.

¹Morris L. Bigge, Learning Theories for Teachers (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 185.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

The meaning of perception is important in correctly understanding how a person experiences insights and therefore changes his life space.

Lewin divides the problem of perception into two categories, "observation" and "interpretation." Observation in a social setting must be related to observation in the scientific method. Scientifically, a person can only report the information he gains through his five senses. This would be called "hard facts" or "concrete data." But interpreting the facts or data requires organization and training. In relating perceptual learning to a social environment, Lewin writes:

Child psychology has established beyond doubt that within the first year of life social perception is well underway. Within three or four years, the child can perceive rather complicated social actions. He is not likely to be fooled by the superficial friendliness of a hostile or uninterested aunt. He is able to "see through" such a surface. Frequently he seems to perceive more clearly than an adult the character of certain social interrelations in his surroundings. This social perception has to be adequate in most of the essential cases if the child is to survive socially. Therefore, objective social observation must be possible and the psychologist should find a way to do in science what any normal three-year-old child does in life.⁴

A person must not only observe what is taking place in his life space, he must also interpret that observation so that

⁴ Kurt Lewin, Field Theory in Social Science (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 156.

understanding and continuity is maintained within the life space.

The meaning of perception and reality are important concepts in correctly understanding how a person experiences insights. His use of such experiences affects how he changes his life space and rearranges his sense of reality.

Purposiveness of Behavior.

The second concept to be considered is purposiveness of behavior. Purposiveness of behavior means that the behavior of an individual is understood to have meaning or purpose for the person exhibiting the behavior. Behavior is not random, implying that a person moves from one activity to another without satisfying some need. What are these needs? A person's needs are those things which he determines will fulfill him as a person. Such needs are also seen as goals. He seeks after them with the intention of satisfying himself and becoming fulfilled. Goals are central to the study of cognitive field theory. A cognitive field psychologist understands a person's behavior as focusing around his goals. He understands a person's behavior as having purpose for that person. Purposiveness of behavior is immanent in the world of experience. This concept is the central feature which draws together and gives meaning to a person's behavioral activity. For this reason, purposiveness is not understood as transcen-

dental to or extending beyond an individual's world, but an integral and central part of that world.

Psychological Function.

The third important concept of cognitive field psychology is the emphasis placed on psychological function. Psychological function refers to the particular activity in which a person is engaged and the meaning which is derived from that activity. A cognitive field psychologist understands learning as taking place when the person doing the activity understands how a particular activity relates to his overall psychological environment. If the person does not know how his activity relates to his goal, he will exhibit a lack of commitment to the activity in which he is engaged.

The term "psychological" may need some clarification. As used thus far, "psychological" speaks of the relatedness of activities. "Psychological" means "in accordance with the logic of a growing mind or intelligence."⁵ To be psychological, a teacher must look at the world through the eyes of the learner. To describe a situation psychologically, one must describe the situation which confronts an individual. Since every situation is viewed as a

⁵Bigge, p. 189.

pattern of personal-environmental relationships which either provide opportunity for the individual or limit his opportunities, the teacher must be willing to not only see the situation as the student sees it, but also be able to see beyond the situation. The student may have a cognitive awareness that a particular activity will enhance his life space or move him toward a goal. For example, learning the alphabet will help him read, but he may also see problems in doing the activity or reaching the goal which are unexpressed and may not be known to the teacher, but nonetheless act as a block or barrier in the student's life space. The cognitive field psychologist may be able to help the student articulate these blocks, thereby enabling the student to see through them and define them. Such defining helps the student relate the blocks to his learning activity and helps him overcome such blocks.

The teacher who helps the student see beyond the situation presents the person with an idea that allows him to see himself without the block or the barrier. The teacher who has reasonably structured the person's life space in his own awareness can now more adequately interpret the relatedness of a particular activity to that person's goal.

An example of psychological function might be a young piano player practicing the scales on the piano. If that person does not understand the usefulness of playing

those same notes over and over again to the improvement of playing the piano, then the practice of scales quickly falls into the category of boredom, and the continuation of such activity at that time is questionable. If, on the other hand, the person playing the scales understands the purpose and usefulness in such practice in the overall scheme of playing the piano, then the interest maintained in that activity will be much higher. In fact, the person may even accept that activity as a challenge to which a high degree of success may be achieved or experienced. In conclusion, the relationship between the activity and one's understanding of the usefulness of that activity to one's overall psychological field is what is meant in the use of psychological function.

Situational Emphasis.

A fourth concept of cognitive field psychology is situational emphasis. This means that a situation is considered as a whole. From the whole the psychologist or viewer moves to specific and detailed analysis of various aspects of the situation. Particular aspects are not viewed as isolated elements or as a field unto themselves, rather the idea of a life space is constantly kept in the forefront and no two concepts or psychological areas in a life space are mutually exclusive. Everything is seen to be dependent to some degree upon everything else, and the

relation of particular and detailed aspects of a situation are always related to the whole.

Contemporaneity.

A fifth concept of cognitive field psychology is the principle of contemporaneity. Simply stated, the principle of contemporaneity means "all at one time." The elements of a psychological field of an individual are the elements under observation. These elements are neither isolated nor excluded, but are understood as operable within the field of the individual "all at the same time." Although a person encounters one idea at a given moment, he is not considered to be influenced first by one idea, then by another, and then at a later time, by some other social or psychological force. Rather, all of these elements are seen to be "working on" the individual at the same time. To the individual, these elements carry valences or values and are therefore important to him. Their influence on him and his psychological field are relative, but nonetheless are considered as influencing him all at the same time.

Integral to the contemporaneity of a life space is the person's past and future. Kurt Lewin said that "Since neither the (physical) past nor the (physical) future

exists at the present moment it cannot have effect at the present."⁶ This means that there is no past and no future except as it enters into the present. Everything which affects behavior at a given time should be represented in the field existing at that time. This concept is called psychological field. This field contains everything which exists for the individual at a given time, including his past and his future. The past and future are simultaneously part of the psychological field.

As an illustration, let us consider a person who believed that if he were good or brave or courageous, he would go to heaven. Whether heaven actually exists has no bearing on his striving to be good or brave or courageous in the present.

When considering the psychological field of a person, everything which affects behavior at a given time should be represented in the field existing at that time. This representation would include not only the person's physical environment, but also his attitudes and values as well as his views concerning the past and future. This means that the past and future are understood psychologically only, not as historical or factual events.

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Kurt Lewin, Principles of Topological Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), p. 35.

Life Space.

Another important concept in the theory of cognitive field psychology is life space. Life space refers to a person's psychological world. It includes himself and his environment. Environment does not only mean those things which are in physical proximity, but those things around him which he is aware of. Unless the person has some awareness of those physically near to him, they are not considered to be part of his life space. Morris Bigge describes these things as having functional and symbolic relationships. Therefore, he includes not only presently perceived objects but also memory, language, myth, art, anticipation, and religion.⁷ Life space is a person's psychological world.

The importance of a life space is its functional nature. "All psychological events--acting, thinking, learning, hoping, dreaming--are functions, not of isolated properties of an individual or his environment, but of mutual relations of a totality of coexisting facts which constitute a life space."⁸ Technically speaking, life space means a psychological situation.

Life space is not simply defined as consciousness or awareness. Life space is rather to be seen as a whole.

⁷Bigge, p. 192.

⁸Ibid., p. 194.

Any change in any part of the life space affects the other parts and therefore the whole. Since life space is the totality of coexisting events, a psychological person and a psychological environment are therefore not mutually exclusive. Rather, a person and his environment are mutually interdependent and are interacting simultaneously. It is impossible to treat one without also treating the other. An example of this is in our criminal justice system. A person who commits crimes repeatedly is considered a criminal and sent to prison. At the end of his term, a judgment is made as to whether this person is functionally rehabilitated. He may then be sent back into his former environment where he again commits more crime.

The same phenomenon is experienced in the training and educating of church school teachers.⁹ I have been serving for the past three years on a regional denominational Christian Education committee. Workshops and labs are planned and well attended by our local church school teachers. The purposes are achieved; the quality is judged excellent. Yet, over the three-year period little noticeable change is recorded in our region's total educational program. The conclusion of the committee is that when teachers are taken out of their environment, provided with the tools with which to do their jobs, and then placed back into their same old environment, little is done to help

them or train them. Rather, a consideration of both the person and his environment in our teacher training program is needed.

The "Person".

A cognitive field theory psychologist interprets the meaning of a self as something which is achieved rather than something which is possessed. A self, therefore, is not the same as an organism, nor is it limited to a mind or body, or both together. Rather, a person is a "consciously behaving self."¹⁰

The concepts "self" and "person" are used interchangeably and may be considered synonyms. A teacher may think of Jack or Betty as persons. However, Jack and Betty, when thinking of themselves, are more likely to use the term "self." A person is not an abstract ego which can be extracted from a particular situation and experienced apart or separately. A self emerges and continues to change throughout life within the context of social living situations which encompass an individual. A basic human need is for the preservation and enhancement of this emergent self or person.

How does a self emerge? Morris Bigge outlines four ways in which a person constructs himself: "1) He reaches

¹⁰ Bigge, p. 194.

certain results by his own efforts and comes to feel responsible for his acts, priding himself on his achievements and blaming himself for his failures; 2) His self, being embodied in values and goals, is realized in his transactions with other people; 3) As he evaluates his conduct over and against an ideal, an ideal self emerges (sometimes considered conscience); 4) His self grows to a prominent place in his memories of a past and his anticipations of a future."¹¹

A self emerges and grows as an important functional region in a psychological field when the person learns to separate out or structure one's self in one's psychological environment. One's self and one's psychological environment constitute a person's life space. "When a person uses the terms--I, me, mine, you, yours, he or she, him or her or his or hers--a self is emerging. Such concepts arise only as a person interacts with other individuals and groups of people."¹² This process of developing a self results in a person acquiring a language, conceptual thinking, and moral, social and religious predispositions and insights.

Are selves always in the process of making? To the extent that an infant is understood, an infant does not make sharp distinctions between his body and his environment.¹³ As a child grows, his world of understanding is

¹¹Ibid., p. 195.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

extended to encompass more of the world about him--his environment. His psychological life space is enlarged. This dynamic process of extending and enlarging one's life space leads to acquiring different facts in one's psychological reality. "Selfhood, except as it has encased itself in a shell of routine, always is in the process of making."¹⁴ This does not mean that everything within a self must be consistent, since any self is capable of containing a number of inconsistent selves or unharmonized dispositions. Rather, this leads the cognitive field psychologist to consider that when a person is acting impulsively, he is ripe for discovery of a more inclusive and richer self which is possible for him but is as yet unrealized. As a person develops new insights, or changes old ones, and forms new habits, the self is in the making.

A far-reaching change in the structure of a self or person can occur through one's developing a significant educational insight. Such insight can occur from something as far-reaching as falling in love, becoming converted, or realizing a great change in physical and social environment.

If the self were identified solely with the biological organism, it could be structured totally on the nature of the environment. Restructuring the self image would then be a result of simply restructuring the environment. But since the self is not identified solely with the

¹⁴

Ibid., p. 196.

biological organism, the structuring of the self is much more aptly described when the organism is seen within a social context. By actively involving one's self in a human environment, the person develops as a self.

The normal process of development produces self-involvement with objects, people, groups, and social organizations in a physical and social environment. In a negative sense, a human organism growing up in complete isolation probably would not develop a self-concept or appear to others as a personality. It seems reasonable to assume that he would have no basis for distinguishing between right and wrong, he would have no developed aesthetic sense, and he would have no language or symbols and would thus be incapable of abstract thinking. Only by living in a human world and having a biological organism of unique type does he emerge a psychological person or self.¹⁵

Psychological Environment.

Related to the life space of an individual is the concept of psychological environment. Psychological environment is what a person makes of his physical-social environment.¹⁶ Psychological environment consists of everything separate from an individual person which has any meaning for that person whatsoever. It includes anything in which there is any psychological movement, either toward or away from. Such a situation may mean a momentary situation in a person's life, or it may mean the total milieu of a person's past situations and future expectations, all wrapped up in one moment.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

Psychological environment differs from the physical-social environment in that a physical environment only includes those things which can be observed by an unbiased second party. A social environment includes only the social situation in which a person is involved which can be observed. Social environment includes the attitudes, values and beliefs of a community in which an individual lives and participates. "Al though physical and social environments furnish a setting for the psychological environments of individuals in a group, they are distinctly different from the psychological environment of any one member of the group."¹⁷

Grasping an understanding of the concepts of cognitive field theory enables a person to better understand the process of growth which occurs, not only in themselves, but in all people. For the teacher in a classroom teaching-learning situation, or for a pastor of a congregation, understanding the process of growth and development improves their effectiveness as educators as well as increases the opportunities for learning within that particular context. But how might the teacher or the pastor understand the behavior of a person? How might they relate themselves to that person in light of some behavior characteristic? These questions will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁷Ibid.

C. INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOR

Cognitive field psychology is contrasted with Stimulus-Response Associationism regarding the way behavior is understood and defined. Associationism refers to a theory of learning that "attempts to account for ideas or the content of consciousness in terms of the combination of sensory and perceptual elements known chiefly through introspective analysis."¹⁸ Such a theory assumes that learning occurs through the mental connection or bond which is said to exist between any sensation, perception, idea or feeling and that has some relational significance to one another as seen by a subject or an observer. Consistent with an S-R associationist's interpretation of psychology as a study of the relationships of biological organisms and their physical and social environments, behavior means "some kind and degree of measurable muscular or glandular movement. The movement may be only incipient or covert or it may be overt; nevertheless, its being behavior means that it is physical movement. Were adequate devices available, it could be observed and measured."¹⁹

Cognitive field psychologists do not accept this definition of behavior. Rather, when speaking of behavior, they imply psychological locomotion but not necessarily any

¹⁸Webster's Third New International Dictionary, unabridged ed. (Springfield: G.&C. Merriam, 1968), p. 133

¹⁹Bigge, p. 211.

sort of physiological movement. Behavior is a movement away from or toward another person or object, but there is no observable physical evidence of such locomotion. Behavior takes place in a life space rather than in observable space. Broadly defined, behavior means "any change in a life space which is subject to psychological laws." Thus "behavior may be a change of the relative location of a person and his environment, a cognitive reorganization of his environment, or a restructuring of his person; it includes any change in valence of any part of his life space."²⁰

Because behavior is defined radically differently by these two basic schools of educational theory, the process of learning for an individual and the development of the growth potential of a person is greatly affected. The next section of this chapter will relate the cognitive field theory approach to the learning process.

D. THE LEARNING PROCESS

According to cognitive field theory, learning is understood as a process in which the individual continually reorders his psychological field. Learning means that the individual gains in his understanding of the relationships of the various psychological elements of his field and enlarges that field. The psychological field of the individual consists of a person's own self-image at any

²⁰Ibid.

given moment in time, his perception of the relationships of his field which draw upon past experiences, his expectations of himself in relationship to some future moment, and the totality of the entities to which he is psychologically related. All of these elements stand within the cognitive field of the individual as a dynamic whole.

The cognitive field theorist understands psychological locomotion as occurring when there is a psychological movement toward or away from any other region within an individual's psychological field. Such movement is the result of the change of valences or the change of values which the individual places upon any one of those regions. A region with a positive valence would effect movement towards that region, whereas a region with a negative valence would effect a movement away from that region. A region in this situation does not necessarily refer to an object or a thing to be gained, but an attitude or feeling which a person has toward such an object.

An example of psychological locomotion as it relates to regions in a life space is the current problem in our urban culture of elderly people living alone and not cooking meals for themselves. The physical need is for food of nutritional value, but the psychological need is for a sense of belonging within a community--a family. The activity of eating alone without a sense of fellowship with others may carry a much larger negative valence than the

nutritional need of supplying proteins and vitamins for one's physical body.

Psychological locomotion occurs in an individual's perceptual field when there is a tension between two regions of that field. In the above example, those regions may be defined simply as eating versus eating alone. The behavior of a person not eating at all may mean that the person values not eating alone as greater than eating at all. If the person suffers hardship in another region as a result of not eating, such as malnutrition, the person may reorder his life space to include a balanced diet. Learning is the result of the reordering of valences in one's life space.

Learning, as the result of the reordering process in one's life space, may also mean the bringing together of two or more entities in a region of a person's life space in such a way that there is new meaning gained for the individual. The concept $2 + 2 = 4$ may have little or no meaning for a young child, even though these terms may have been present in the person's life space for some time. But when the child is putting together two apples of his own with two apples which belong to his brother and now sees that he has four apples, the terms $2 + 2 = 4$ may have new meaning. The person can identify these terms which before were unimportant to him with another region of his life space which is important to him and draw a conclusion

regarding the inter-relatedness of these two regions. The person has learned something.

Learning occurs when there is a change in the cognitive structure of a person's life space. These changes are in three basic areas: generalization, differentiation, and restructurization.

Generalization is a process where the individual perceives the whole of a life space. A person goes into a room and immediately takes an overview of the room. He perceives people, chairs, blackboards, etc., in the room. The person is said to be generalizing his cognitive structure of himself and his psychological environment. The person may realize that the psychological environment of the room is similar to previous experiences. The person is forming a concept within his perceptual field which includes previously differentiated aspects of himself and/or his environment. "Generalization arises through categorization of subregions into a unified region of one's life space."²¹

Differentiation is the opposite of generalization. Differentiation and generalization are psychologically complementary. Differentiation is the process in which regions are subdivided into smaller regions. Through the process of differentiation, a vague and unstructured region of one's life space becomes cognitively structured and more specific. The person who walked into a room for the first

²¹Ibid., p.227.

time, after generalizing his cognitive awareness of himself and the room in his life space, begins to differentiate his life space in that room into smaller regions. He becomes more aware of the people in the room. He may even catch a friendly smile, notice individual pictures on the wall, etc. The person makes more sense of what was before unstructured or confusing.

Not only does a person's life space go through a process of generalization and differentiation, but the person is also going through the process of restructuring his life space. He is changing the meanings of various regions in his life space in relationship to himself and to one another. Restructuring of regions in a person's life space means the person is defining a previously undefined region or he is redefining that region in relationship to other regions of his life space. Such redefining of regions goes with a change in valence of a region, or a change in goal orientation. The person's behavior reflects such changes. The person learns which actions will lead to certain specific results.

The "man-in-the-room" example may follow this definition. After going through the process of generalizing the psychological environment of himself in the room and differentiating subregions of the room in his perception, the person may have structured the room initially in such a way that the person who smiled at him was someone he would

like to meet. After briefly surveying the people surrounding this initial person, the individual perceives someone else whom he does not wish to become acquainted with. He may restructure his life space in such a way that moving in a previously determined direction is now decided against. Instead, there is a movement in another direction, the physical movement following the psychological movement. Learning is the constant restructuring of one's life space, differentiating concepts which were previously perceived in very general terms. Morris Bigge summarizes cognitive field theory's approach to learning:

A person learns through differentiating, generalizing, and restructuring his person and his psychological environment in such a way as to acquire new or changed insights or meanings, and thereby achieves changes in motivation, group belongingness, time perspective, and ideology; thus he gains in control of himself and his world.²²

E. SUMMARY

Cognitive field theory is an interpretive theory of education which brings together the person as a self in relationship with an environment, defining and explaining the growth and development of the self as well as the interaction which takes place between both. Through investigation of the concepts integral to the theory, understanding the theory as a whole is invited. Those concepts pertinent

²² Ibid., p. 230.

are perception and reality, purposiveness of behavior, psychological function, situational emphasis, the principle of contemporaneity, the concept of an individual's life space, the concept of a person, and the meaning of a person's psychological environment. From these concepts, an interpretation of behavior and an interpretation of learning have been presented.

The question must now be raised: What validity does cognitive field theory have in relation to the whole scheme of things? From the historical religious point of view, is this theory congruent with or incongruent with man's relationship to the church or with God? Is there a theological basis for accepting and applying this theory in one's personal or vocational life, as a tool of Christian education, or as a description of the whole of the life of a congregation of the church? The next chapter will speak to these concerns.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF COGNITIVE FIELD THEORY

A. INTRODUCTION

The gift of the Christian faith is encountered when theological reflection takes place. Every discipline requires an involvement in this task. For this reason cognitive field theory is subject to theological scrutiny here.

Every theory of education makes basic assumptions, either implicit or explicit, regarding the nature of man, the nature of God, and the nature of the world. The structure of the relationships which exist between God, man, and the world grow out of these basic assumptions. Cognitive field theory at this point is no different from other educational theories. But there are some basic differences between the assumptions of cognitive field theory and other theories of education.

In this chapter the assumptions of cognitive field theory will be reflected against a partial presentation of the theology of Paul Tillich and the theology of John MacQuarrie. How does God relate to man? Such a question is answered through the revelatory event where God encounters man in revelation. Because revelation takes place within the context of a concrete situation, the nature and role of the church as a community of faith providing the

context of a growing relationship between man and God will be discussed at the close of the chapter.

B. THE NATURE OF MAN

The fundamental question in any theological inquiry is the question of God. God is the answer implied in the ontological question of being. The basic ontological question is: What is being itself? Philosophy raises the question of being as being. Theology answers the question of being itself with God.¹

But theology and philosophy must both concern themselves with the question of the structure of being. Although the arena of ontological discussion is not the theological arena, the theologian must be familiar with the central concepts of ontology from the point of view of their theological significance.²

Tillich outlines four levels of ontological concepts. These levels are "1) the basic ontological structure which is the implicit condition of the ontological question; 2) the elements which constitute the ontological structure; 3) the characteristics of being which are the conditions of existence; and 4) the categories of being and knowing."³

¹Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), I, 164.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Why is the question of the ontological concepts important? Tillich argues that the ontological concepts are a priori in the strictest sense of the word. The ontological concepts "determine the nature of experience. They are present whenever something is experienced."⁴ Since cognitive field theory is concerned with the structure of experiential data, the ontological question and the four levels of ontological thinking are immensely important in providing the theological basis of cognitive field theory.

The basic ontological question assumes a subject-object structure of being. There is an asking subject and an object about which the question is being asked. This subject-object structure of being presupposes a self-world structure as the basic articulation of being. The self has a world to which it belongs. This basic self-world structure precedes all other structures.⁵

The second level of ontological analysis assumes that the basic structure of being is polar in character. A basic polarity of the structure of being prevents a self from moving in one direction without consideration for its opposite. The three elements which constitute the basic ontological structure are: individuality and universality, dynamics and form, and freedom and destiny. "In these three polarities the first element expresses the self-

⁴Ibid., I, 166.

⁵Ibid., I, 164.

relatedness of being, its power of being something for itself, while the second element expresses the belongingness of being, its character of being a part of a universe of being."⁶

The third level expresses the power of being to exist. There is a basic duality of essential and existential being, a duality which interrelates one with the other.⁷ This third level is concerned with the analysis of finitude in polar-relation with infinity.

The fourth level of the ontological concepts is concerned with the basic forms of thought and being. At issue in particular is the participation of thought and being in the nature of finitude and the resultant structures of finite being and thinking.⁸

Tillich's formulation of the self-world structure of being aids the cognitive field theorist in theological reflection. "Being a self means being separated in some way from everything else....At the same time, this self is aware that it belongs to that at which it looks."⁹ The implication of this view is that every self has an environment in which it lives.

All beings have an environment which is 'their' environment....Its environment consists in those things which it has an active interrelation. Different beings within the same

⁶Ibid., I, 165.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., I, 170.

limited space have different environments.¹⁰

The self interrelates with its environment, structuring both the environment and its own self. The environment acts upon the self. This mutual interaction leads Tillich to claim that the "self and environment determine each other."¹¹

Cognitive field theory makes a basic assumption about the nature of man. The assumption is that man is naturally "neutral-interactive." ("Naturally" means a characteristic which is genetically inherited by all members of a species, in this case, man.) "Neutral" implies that man, collectively speaking of all members of the human race, is neither naturally good nor naturally bad. His moral disposition will unfold as he interacts with his environment. His moral disposition is not given to him as a basic characteristic of creation.

If man were assumed to be of some other natural unfoldment, then man, when left to his own devices, would naturally develop in that particular direction. If man is assumed to be naturally evil, then we can expect nothing good from him. If left to his own devices, his evilness will naturally unfold. No other traits other than bad ones can be expected from him. On the other hand, if man is assumed to be naturally good, then everything that comes

¹¹ Ibid.

from him will be good, unless he is in some way corrupted by some outside force. Neutrality in man's basic moral nature means that we assume that man by nature is neither good nor bad, but that he has potential related to both which is in no way connected with innate badness or goodness.

The second part of this assumption must now be explored. By "interactive," man is assumed to interact with his environment. Other possibilities are "active" and "passive." If man is basically "active" regarding his environment, then he is inborn with natural characteristics and his behavior and psychological reality affect his environment only. Environments serve only as locations for the natural unfoldment of the self. Environment does not affect man. On the other hand, if man is basically "passive" or "reactive" to his environment, then man's characteristics are largely a product of environmental influences. Reality is centered in environment. Man's existential situation is totally a result of his environmental influences, and there is nothing he can do except change environments. To say that man is naturally "interactive" means that man's psychological characteristics result from his sizing up his physical and social environments. His reality consists of what he makes of that which comes to him. In other words, his reality is what he gains from his experience. To use Tillich's words, the "self and

the environment determine each other."¹²

Since the nature of man and his environment is an expression of his basic and on-going relationship with God, the encounter of God with his creation through the revelatory event will now be explored.

C. THE NATURE OF REVELATION

Revelation is a primary experience in the life of man. From the revelatory event man finds his true identity, his purpose in life, and his correct relationship with God. Gerald Downing (Has Christianity a Revelation?) describes revelation as "the primary source for theology" and "a basic category in theological thinking."¹³ Without this experience of revelation in the life of man, life would lack meaning existentially and historically. The tension within man, which Paul Tillich describes as an existence between the abyss of nothingness and the fulfillment of our potentialities in our creation as the image of God, would fail to exist. There would be only nothingness. Life would be void of meaning.

But revelation does not strike man outside the context of his existence. There is a process in the revelatory experience. There is also a message, a word, which is di-

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 6, citing Gerald Downing, Has Christianity a Revelation? (London: SCM Press, 1964).

rected to a person in light of his relationship with God. The message is of utmost importance for the person because it brings with it the very relief from existential anxiety which the person seeks. The message (whatever that message is for any particular individual) could not be more appropriate. Thus, the message fulfills man. He has reached a new plateau. He is drawn closer to the source of his being, his creator. It is this closeness between the function or purpose of the revelatory event and the process of what cognitive field theorists call insightful learning which will be compared here.

Revelation is not without its purpose. This is an indirect way of saying that God is not without his purpose. Revelation establishes the relationship between God and man. God speaks to man out of man's own situation. Man receives the message and is free to act upon that message. But what does the message contain? What is its content, its import, for the life of the individual?

The word "revelation" literally means "removing the veil." Traditionally, revelation has been used to mean "the manifestation of something hidden which cannot be approached through ordinary ways of gaining knowledge."¹⁴ In a wider sense, this means revealing something which was not known beforehand, such as a thought, a fact, or a truth. In

¹⁴
Ibid., p. 108.

a narrower sense, revelation means "a special and extraordinary manifestation which removes the veil from something which is hidden in a special and extraordinary way."¹⁵ This hiddenness is the mystery of the revelatory event. In its proper sense, the word "mystery" comes from the Greek word "muein," which means "closing the eyes" or "closing the mouth." For knowledge to be gained, it is necessary to open the eyes in order to grasp the object or to open the mouth to test the insight with others.

John MacQuarrie also suggests that revelation is "some kind of unveiling, whereby what has hitherto been concealed from us is now opened up."¹⁶ But he unobtrusively goes on to say that this is true of all knowing. "We have attained truth when that which was concealed is made unhidden, brought out into the light."¹⁷ The distinctive religious use of the word "revelation" is made when, in the revelatory process, "the initiative lies with that which is known. We do not bring it into the light or strip away what is concealing it, as we do in our researches into matters within the world, but rather that which is known comes into the light, or, better still, provides the light by which it is known and by which we in turn know ourselves."¹⁸

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 77.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

That which is mysterious remains mysterious (consider Rudolph Otto's mysterium tremendum) but the person is no longer the same. His experience has affected his self-image and his perception of the world around him, i.e., his environment. The polarities within which the individual exists are no longer perceived in their heretofore usual sense, but seen within the context of a new experience, a new awareness about himself. His responsibility as an individual to the revelatory event is mirrored against his finitude as a human being. He cannot overcome the event, only accept it as a gift. He cannot ignore it, for he knows now about himself what he didn't know before. Any attempt to ignore or dismiss the experience only produces greater anxiety than the anxiety which is produced from the initial state of his existence, i.e., his call to act versus his limitations as a person living in a finite environment.

An insight occurs to an individual as a new possibility to a current problem. Only as a problem is known does an insight come to a person. The person is now able to work the problem through. The object of the insight is the person to whom the problem appears. If it were to someone else, the problem would not appear to be real. But the person who recognizes the problem as real--as an obstacle to his reaching his goal--is also aware of new possibilities for overcoming the obstacle. Thus, the new possibilities make an impact upon the person; the whole problem has now

changed. Indeed, it is no longer a problem, but has now become an opportunity for new growth, a new step forward toward his goal.

Where does the insight come from? It is this very point that makes theological inquiry of utmost importance. The tendency might be for the individual to say to himself, "Why didn't I see that before?" This question assumes that the person could be where he is now as before he had the problem. But this is impossible. If God is assumed to have had the answer before the problem was encountered, then the individual could very well be angry at God for not revealing the answer sooner, thus saving the person much pain and misery. A more arduous approach is the possibility that several answers are possible at any number of times, but one answer was chosen as one possibility for this particular problem. This answer makes sense for that individual, given his past expectations of himself, his present perception of his problem, and his goal at the present moment. Thus the insight which comes to the individual comes to him as a revelatory event. The answer is seen to have come from God, because now the person appears as the object of such an insight. The individual identifies himself with the problem. But the individual also understands himself to have been known by God, to have been fully exposed as an individual; and the revelatory event comes as a fulfillment of the individual's possibilities as a creation

of God.

According to cognitive field theory, learning occurs through a person gaining insights. In theological terminology, self-understanding, which is a dimension of faith, occurs through the experience of revelation. The character of the revelatory experience is that which is granted or gained through the experience, and comes to the person as a gift. What is disclosed is a dimension of the holy. The holy "breaks in" and the movement of the experience is from beyond man toward man.¹⁸

The general character of the learning event in education and the revelatory event in the religious experience are very close. Macquarrie builds upon this similarity by saying that

almost anything in the world can be an occasion for revelation. Natural phenomena may take on the dimensions of a revelatory situation, and in primitive and archaic religions especially, the holy is believed to manifest itself in nature. At a more sophisticated level, nature is replaced by history and personal relationships as the locus wherein the holy discloses itself; or in some cases, the revelatory experience is entirely interiorized, and the holy is encountered in the depths of the human mind itself.¹⁹

Such a bringing together of the religious and the secular, or, in other words, the general character of the learning event, broadens the understanding of the nature of man in his relationship with God. The realm of life in which God

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

is encountered as being holy and the realm of life in which growth and development of the individual occur are drawn together in the similarity of the process which is experienced in each. More clearly understanding the dimensions of one area increases our understanding of the other.

This closeness in interpretation also makes understandable the revelatory experience of any one individual. If a person's revelatory experience lies outside the realm of experience of everyone to which he relates that experience, there would be no basis for accepting or affirming or understanding that person's very personal experience. But since the process of the revelatory experience is similar to other areas of personal and inter-personal encounter, then any one person's religious experience can be shared and affirmed in the context of a religious community. Although other people may not understand precisely the meaning of a particular experience of an individual, they can relate with that person through their own personal experience of the revelatory event.

Macquarrie describes the sustaining character of a community of faith as arising out of the revelatory experience of its founders and leaders. "A community of faith... traces its history back to what may be called a 'classic' or 'primordial' revelation. This classic revelation... becomes as it were the paradigm for experiences of the holy in that community."²⁰ The community of faith remains a

²⁰Ibid., p. 7.

community and moves out in history as a community because of the continuing disclosure of the holy to the community. The primordial revelation is continually renewed in present experience.

Primordial revelation, which comes from the thinking of Heidegger, also carries with it an understanding of the revelatory event which is very important in this context. There is a characteristic of primordial thinking in which the subject or the person having the experience is subjected to that which is known. The self, or the individual in this experience, is transcended, mastered, and known by itself. Macquarrie describes this kind of thinking as having a meditative character, where the person waits and listens rather than probes and calculates. The person responds to the address of being or "answers the demands of being."²¹

Macquarrie outlines two other modes of thinking which give substance to the understanding of the revelatory experience. These modes of thinking are "calculative thinking" and "existential thinking." Calculative thinking is the most common form of thinking. The pattern is a subject-object pattern. This kind of thinking is directed toward handling, using, manipulating, or incorporating an object within our perceived environment. Technology and science

²¹ Ibid., p. 85, translated from Martin Heidegger, Was ist Metaphysik? (Bonn: Cohen, 1929), p.29, pp 47, 49.

represent very sophisticated expressions of this mode of thinking.

Existential thinking is more personal in nature. Its aim is not the use or exploitation of an object, as is calculative thinking, though it may aim at the well-being of the object. Existential thinking is more subject oriented, participating in the thinking or the seeing, of another subject. It does not imply that what is thought about is an object, but rather recognizes what is thought about as another subject.²² There is a "thinking into the existence of the other subject." Such "thinking into" is possible because of the common kind of being on both sides.

Related to existential thinking is "repetitive" thinking. "Repetitive" thinking does not simply mean going over something, but rather "going into some experience that has been handed down in such a way that it is, so to speak, brought into the present, and its insights and possibilities made alive again."²³ Such thinking can occur with anything which has been handed down from the past, whether it be an historical happening, a document, or a saying. To understand what has been handed down, there must be a thinking "into" it, thereby thinking "again" and "with" the agent or the author who originated the document or event.

²²Ibid., p. 83.

²³Ibid.

D. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The church is a concern of this chapter because of the function of the community in the dynamics of learning. For Lewis Sherrill, community is defined as "a body of relationships which affect the becoming of its individual members."²⁴ In light of its character as a body of relationships, the church will be discussed as the covenant community of God.

The nature of the church as a covenant community of God defines a calling, a relationship, and a purpose. The calling comes from God. People are drawn into the church as they respond to a divine initiative to express their humanity in its highest fulfillment: that of the likeness of Christ. Therefore, the fundamental issue of the covenant community of God is centered upon the identity of the one doing the calling and less upon the gathering. To quote Bishop Newbigin, the church "derives its character not from its membership but from its Head, not from those who join it but from Him who calls it into being."²⁵ The calling is therefore a calling into relationship and the relationship is expressed in and through Christ.

²⁴Robert R. Boehlke, Theories of Learning in Christian Education (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 113 citing Lewis Sherrill, The Gift of Power (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 45-46.

²⁵Ibid., p. 114, citing Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 21.

The church as the covenant community of God provides the context in which that work takes place. It is within the covenant community where reflection, study, and communion occur. Such study and reflection are not simply of facts or historical data, but upon the relationship of each person and the community as a whole to its perceived relationship to those facts and historical data and the personage of Christ which emerges. Through the covenant community Christ is manifest, much as He was on the Road to Emmaus²⁶. The covenant community not only provides the context for each individual to grow in his/her relationship to God, but through the incarnation of God the identity of the Church as the Body of Christ is experienced and witnessed to as well. Through the church, the revelatory event is experienced and given opportunity for growth. One person's experience is shared and given new meaning through dialogue with other people who have experienced or who can relate themselves to such experiences. Through the relationships of the community, problems arise which provide new substance to each person: How do they relate themselves to Christ in light of this present experience? The working out of such experiences provides new opportunities for growth.

²⁶ Hans Dieter Betz, "The Origin and Nature of Christian Faith according to the Emmaus Legend", Interpretation, XXIII (1969), 32-46.

In terms of cognitive field theory, the revelatory event occurs in light of a particular problem. By becoming aware of, or confronted with the nature of, a given situation, possible new insights occur. The insights come, not by standing away from, but by standing next to or in the midst of the situation. Theologically, we are led through the problem by the revelatory event which speaks to us in a given context and provides new answers, new possibilities for our lives together in community.

E. SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a theological understanding to the concepts expressed in cognitive field theory. Cognitive field theory understands learning as taking place when a person is grasping or making sense out of his environment. Insightful learning is the key concept for cognitive field theory at this point. Insights occur in the individual when new meaning is found. Insights occur in the mind of the self. This idea of the person or self relating to and interacting with his environment is supported by the basic ontological principle posed by Paul Tillich. For Tillich, the ontological principle is based upon a self-world structure of being. The self interacts with the world and is related to the world.

Even though insightful learning is important to

cognitive field theory, is there any theological justification for such a concept? Through the description of revelation by both Tillich and Macquarrie, the attempt was made to relate the gaining of insights and the receiving of a revelation. The process of insightful learning and the experience of the revelatory event are basically the same process.

The context of learning is very important. For Christian education, the church as a community of faith expressing and witnessing their common relationship to Christ, provides the context for receiving the theological demand which comes to everyone as a gift from God.

As mentioned earlier, the revelatory event takes place in an environment suitable to sustain and give meaning to that initial experience. In Christian education, as persons grow in self-understanding and their understanding of their environment, the Christian community provides a context in which those experiences can grow and give meaning to the person and the community.

The nature of the church as a Christian community will now be discussed.

CHAPTER III

THE PARABLE AS LEARNING EVENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The parables in the New Testament present a teaching medium which is both helpful and illusive to pastors, teachers, and students of the Bible concerned with the message of the Gospel. The parables are helpful because they represent in the main authentic teachings of Jesus. Through them the message that Jesus was presenting to his audience can be appropriated more clearly. The parables provide a vehicle in which a person can "stand next" to the historical Jesus. The goal of such closeness, such questing, is the enchancement of life.

The parables of the New Testament are often strange to a person living in the 20th century. There is so little known about the actual situations in which the parables were first told. In fact, there is oftentimes considerable doubt as to the identity of the one telling the story. Such doubt confronts the church with monumental problems, since the church for centuries accepted and used the parables as though they came directly from Jesus. Critical research indicates that this is not always the case. Questions concerning authorship and setting automatically raise questions concerning intention and message.

The focus of this chapter is not to attempt the extremely complex task of authenticating any particular parable by showing that Jesus or someone else originated that parable.¹ Rather, the task of this chapter is to show that, since the parables spoke to the theological concerns of the people of the first century in their setting, they can more effectively be used to speak to the theological concerns of the modern world. Since much information has been made available through form-critical research in recent years to make more objective guesses regarding the setting or authorship of a particular parable, such information will here be appropriated and used as it relates to the immediate problem of this chapter.

B. THE PARABLE AS LANGUAGE EVENT

The parables of Jesus are called "language events" because something decisive happens through what is said. People are presented with God's demand upon them. The listener has a certain understanding of what the reality of the world consists. He knows the expectations which are placed upon him by his community. The barrier which existed between Jesus and the people opposed to him must have been very great. The parable provided a link, a path

¹See Perrin's criteria for authenticating Jesus' parables. Norman Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 39ff.

for establishing communication, between Jesus and his listeners. Linnemann says that to tell a parable in such a situation is to risk everything.² The intent of the author of the parable hinges upon the listeners grasping the point. Everything hinges upon the power of language. The person who risks everything in such a situation most definitely wants his listeners to come into agreement with him across the gulf of opposition. Linnemann outlines several possibilities for such opposition to which the power of language through a parable would not apply:

If it is a matter of opposition in doctrine, the disputants will still always have common basic presuppositions, which none of them questions; if it is a matter of moral exhortation, the speaker and the man addressed are still at one in the basic recognition of the good, and also agree extensively on what the good is; apart from the point at issue. If it is a question of imparting knowledge we cannot even talk of opposition, because here only the difficulties of comprehension need to be overcome. If, however, the opposition reaches right down to the depths of existence, the parable teller can only find a common point of reference in the basic features of language.³

The difficulty of the parables as language event for the person of today is that, although the parables have been retained, the same effect is not received as that which was received then. The language event cannot be passed down through history. Language is subject to

²Eta Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 32.

³Ibid.

historical change.⁴ The problem of the response to the parables today is that today's situation is different from the situation of the first century.

Even though the language event cannot be transmitted through history, the meaning of the parables can be made intelligible. The same experience of judgment can be felt today as was felt when the parables were first uttered, but this takes skill on the part of the teller. The needs and concerns of the people listening must be taken into account. In cognitive field theory, the field of the listener must be understood. Knowing the forces and concerns of the audience, the pastor/teacher can then interpret the parables into the new situation, leading people to experience insights about God's demand for them which they had not experienced before, or had ignored. The possibility of a new decision is presented.

C. THE FUNCTION OF THE PARABLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since the parables express a language event for the original listeners, what function do the parables fulfill in the New Testament? How can that language event be made expressive and intelligible to persons of the 20th century?

⁴Ibid.

Form-critical research places the setting of the parables of the New Testament within a conflict situation.⁵ "They correct, reprove, attack."⁶ Jeremias describes them as "weapons of warfare." Each parable confronts the listeners for an immediate response.

Since the Christian faith by its very nature grows out of personal conflict situations, the parables were readily available tools for the leaders of the Early Church in defending and edifying the faith of its membership. For the pastor/educator in a current pastoral setting, the parables are also available for teaching and edifying the Christian faith. From the context of the parable, the listener sees himself in his conflict situation and is moved to either accept the mode of life presented to him in the parable as his own, or to reject it.

In spite of the doubts of authorship, setting, purpose and other historical-religio problems, we can be relatively assured that the parables of the synoptic tradition represent a strong fabric of first century Christianity. Jeremias describes the parables of Jesus as a "fragment of the original rock of tradition."⁷ The parables of the synoptic tradition reflect: 1) the character of Jesus' good news; 2) the eschatological nature of his preaching; 3) the intensity of his summons to repentance; and 4) his

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 11.

conflict with Pharisaism.⁸ Through the parables we are getting close to the message of Jesus. What is left for the person who is interested in Jesus' message is to hear the parables as Jesus' audience heard them. For the person living in the twentieth century separated from those initial experiences of Jesus' ministry by the cross and resurrection events, and by 2000 years of history, the task is very difficult.

Norman Perrin summarizes modern research into the parables by stating that the 'Sitz im Leben Jesu' of the parables is the eschatology of Jesus. This eschatology is focused upon the Kingdom of God. The parables become the experience of the Kingdom which the hearers up to that point have only talked about. "The Kingdom of God actually becomes a reality for the hearer of the parables in the parables themselves, which are, by their nature as parable, peculiarly well designed to manifest the reality of the Kingdom as parable."⁹ While a limited number of parables are concerned to proclaim the Kingdom of God directly, many are concerned with the experience and/or subsequent activity of men confronted by the reality of God at work.

Our next concern will be one of understanding the particular setting in the life of first century Judaism to which Jesus was addressing himself.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Perrin, p. 82, referring to E. Jüngel, Paulus und Jesus (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), p. 135-74.

D. THE SETTING OF THE PARABLES:

THE PARABLE OF THE FATHER'S LOVE

The setting of a parable is important for understanding the meaning or intention of that particular parable. Without knowing something about the life--the situation of the people who heard the parable--the intention of the speaker can only be guessed. The original listeners understood the problem that the speaker was addressing in the parable. The people were immediately drawn into the parable because they recognized the parable to be about them. Once engaged, they were then receptive to whatever insight or conclusion the story-teller wished to give to them. Theologically, they were receptive to hear anew God's demand for their lives.

Against the backdrop of this commonality between the speaker and the listeners is the cultural milieu which surrounded and engulfed the religious community of Palestine during the first century A.D. For example, there was a highly developed sense of sin in Judaism at that time.¹⁰ A person's transgression of the Law was severely weighed against his retribution. The ways of atoning for transgressions were also highly developed. Feast days, temple sacrifices and ritual cleansing were all related in some way to seeking the path which would be pleasing to God

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

that he might grant his forgiveness. A man owed God full obedience. Any transgression put one in debt to God. But real forgiveness came from God. And the Pharisees sought to maintain the balance between the requirement of a person to seek God's pardon, and the person's inability to attain forgiveness except as a gracious gift from God.¹¹

Although this system of transgressions before the Law and forgiveness from God was strictly adhered to, this system nonetheless only applied to those who already, by reason of birth or sanctification, belonged to God's chosen. This system did not apply to those outside the boundaries of the Jewish religion. Gentiles were sinners and lived apart from the Law. But 'sinner' and 'Gentile sinner' did not mean the same thing. A Jew who sinned could hope for mercy from his heavenly Father, but a Gentile could not count God as his Father in the same way a Jew could.¹²

There was also another distinction. There were certain vocations which put a person in the category of 'Gentile sinner' even though he had his birthright in the Jewish faith. The worst of these were: the dice player, usurer, pigeon flyer, trafficker in seventh-year produce. Also added to this list were: shepherd, tax collector and revenue farmer.¹³ These people were regarded as "beyond

¹¹Ibid., p. 91.

¹²Ibid., p. 92. ¹³Ibid., p. 93.

hope" and were treated as Gentiles. These people were denied their normal citizenship rights, and carried the same standing as Gentile slaves.¹⁴ There were, therefore, three kinds of 'sinners': "Jews who could turn to their heavenly Father in penitence and hope; Gentile sinners for whom hope was dubious, most Jews regarding them as beyond the pale of God's mercy; and Jews who had made themselves as Gentiles, for whom penitence was, if not impossible, certainly almost insurmountably difficult."¹⁵

It is against this background in which Jesus presents the kingly activity of God: that of the forgiveness of sins. According to Perrin, the forgiveness of sins is the central specific aspect of the proclamation of Jesus about the Kingdom of God which the gospel tradition presents.¹⁶ When Jesus presented the forgiveness of sins to 'sinners and Gentile sinners,' his contemporaries took strong offense at him. Overcoming this offense then becomes the setting of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or, as Jeremias suggests, the Parable of the Father's Love.

Although all the authors agree that the highly systemized sense of sin in Judaism presented problems to Jesus in his activity with sinners and Jews considered as Gentile sinners, Jeremias suggests that the purpose of the parables is not specifically the proclamation of the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

gospel, but the vindication of the gospel which Jesus has already proclaimed to the poor.¹⁷ Jeremias puts the Sitz im Leben (Setting in Life) of the parables in Jesus' address to his opponents, not an address to the poor. Jesus is defending and vindicating the gospel. The parables are "controversial weapons against the critics and foes of the gospel who are indignant that Jesus should declare that God cares about sinners and whose special attack is directed against Jesus' practice of eating with the despised. At the same time the parables are intended to win over the opponents.¹⁸

An outline of this parable will be given before discussing the parable in more detail.

¹⁷ Jeremias, p. 124.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The Parable of the Father's Love (Prodigal Son)

- I. Introduction v. 11-12
 - A. A man has two sons
 - B. Speech of younger son
 - 1. directed to father
 - 2. request for "his" share of property
 - C. Response of Father
 - 1. divides property
 - 2. gives equal distribution

- II. Development v. 13-16
 - A. Activity of younger son v. 13
 - 1. gathered property
 - 2. took journey
 - 3. squandered property
 - B. Situation of younger son v. 14
 - 1. without property
 - 2. famine crisis
 - 3. he is in want
 - C. Response of younger son v. 15
 - 1. identify himself
 - 2. seek employment
 - D. Judgment v. 16
 - 1. he is hungry
 - 2. no one cares

- III. Transition: Repentance v. 17-19
 - A. Reflection of younger son v. 17
 - 1. comfort of Father's servants
 - 2. discomfort of himself
 - B. Plan v. 18-19
 - 1. he will return v. 18a
 - 2. he will seek mercy v. 18b-19
 - a. he has sinned v. 18b
 - b. he is without birthright v. 19a
 - c. he will plead acceptance v. 19b

- IV. Disposition v. 20-24
 - A. Return of younger son v. 20a
 - B. Response of father v. 20b
 - 1. identifies son
 - 2. has compassion
 - a. runs to him
 - b. embraces him
 - c. kisses him
 - C. Speech of son v. 21
 - 1. "I have sinned"
 - a. "against God"
 - b. "against you"
 - 2. "I am unworthy"
 - D. Response of father v. 22
 - 1. Speech of father
 - a. bring robe
 - b. bring ring
 - c. bring shoes
 - d. kill fatted calf
 - 2. Conclusion of speech v. 24
 - a. "My son..." v. 24a-b
 - 1) "was dead, now alive" v. 24a
 - 2) "was lost, now found" v. 24b
 - b. They made merry v. 24c
- V. Another Perspective v. 25-32
 - A. Opening Statement v. 25
 - 1. elder son present
 - 2. elder son perceives events
 - a. comes near house
 - b. hears music and dancing
 - 3. elder son questions events v. 26-27
 - a. calls to servant v. 26
 - b. seeks meaning
 - c. speech of servant v. 27
 - 1) younger brother returned
 - 2) father killed fatted calf
 - a) his son is safe
 - b) his son is sound
 - B. Development and Conclusion v. 28-32
 - 1. response of elder son v. 28a
 - a. elder son is angry
 - b. elder son refuses to go in
 - 2. response of father v. 28b
 - a. goes to son
 - b. entreats son
 - 3. speech of elder son v. 29
 - a. opening statement
 - 1) "I served you"
 - 2) "I never disobeyed you"

- b. statement of "unjust" retribution
 - 1) "you never gave me a kid"
 - 2) "I was not merry with my friends"
- c. comparison drawn
 - 1) life of younger son
 - a) devoured living
 - b) returned
 - 2) response of father:
killing of fatted calf
- 4. speech of father v. 31-32
 - a. affirmation of relationship v. 31
 - 1) addresses him "son"
 - 2) statement of loyalty
 - 3) statement of possession
 - b. justification of activity v. 32
 - 1) the merriment is proper
 - 2) reason for merriment
 - a) "your brother -
 - 1. was dead"
 - 2. now alive"
 - b) "your brother -
 - 1. was lost"
 - 2. now found"

This parable is not an allegory presented to the poor, but an actual life-situation addressed to Jesus' opponents, a situation with which all of them were familiar. In the parable the father is not God, as would be the case if the story were an allegory. Rather, God is named: "Father, I have sinned against heaven (God) and against you." By such naming, the father is shown to be not God but an earthly father. However, by the expressions used in referring to the father-son relationship, the father, in his love for his son, reveals an image of God. The dividing of property in v. 12 was a common experience among Jews, particularly since there seemed to be more opportunity for a younger son in the more prosperous countries of the surrounding Mediterranean area than in Palestine. The younger son not only wanted the right of possession of his property, he also wanted the right of disposal, an indication that he intended to lead an independent life.¹⁹ The caring for swine in v. 16 identifies the son as falling completely out of relationship with his heritage, since the work of a shepherd to a Jew was considered by Jews to make one a 'Gentile sinner.' Verse 16 implies that the son wanted to eat what the swine ate, but did not do it. The wording indicates an unfulfilled wish on the part of the son: "He would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate, and

¹⁹Ibid., p. 129.

no one gave him anything.²⁰ His unfulfilled wish meant as much to him as if he had already done so. Verse 17 begins a transition. "He came to himself" is an expression of repentance. The expression in v. 19: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" states the lost-ness of the son. His claim to his father's inheritance is gone. What right does the son have to be considered "a son?" His answer is, he has none.

The power of the story reaches a climax in the response of the father who sees his son coming down the road. The father "ran and embraced him and kissed him." All three of these words speak heavily to the Palestinian Jew greatly influenced by strict cultural patterns and guidelines of behavior. It was most unacceptable for an aged oriental father to run to his son. The son always came to the father. The father was never the one to go after his son. Thus, the image of the father running after his son was considered unusual and undignified. The kiss is a sign of forgiveness. The sign of forgiveness is given even before the son makes his speech. The son makes his speech, but the father does not allow him to finish. In fact, he does the opposite of what the son was concluding. Instead of making the son as a wage-earner, the father treats him as an honored guest. The father orders a robe, a ring, and

²⁰ Ibid.

shoes for his son. All three of these references speak with considerable meaning to Eastern culture. A ceremonial robe in the East was a mark of high distinction.²¹ The ring given implied the bestowal of authority upon the son. The son was not only an honored guest, but was also a man of authority.²² Shoes were a luxury which only free men could afford. In the story, the son is given shoes to distinguish him as a free man and not as a slave who goes barefoot. The father orders a fattened calf to be killed. (v. 23). The killing of a calf meant a feast for family and servants alike. Since meat was rarely eaten, the preparation of a fattened calf implied a special occasion, "the festal reception of the returning son to the family table..."²³ In the speaking of all these orders by the father, it was evident to everyone who heard the story that the father intended that the son was forgiven and reinstated as a son. The first conclusion in v. 24 describes the change which is taking place: resurrection from the dead, and the finding of the lost one.

The parable takes a turn when a new factor is discovered: there is an elder son who learns what is happening. This turn should not be surprising since the introduction includes both sons: "A man has two sons." But so much emphasis is placed on the relationship between the father

²¹Ibid., p. 130.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

and younger son that the consideration of an elder son almost comes as a surprise. The elder son is angry and refuses to participate. In v. 28 the father goes out to his elder son and speaks to him kindly and in a friendly fashion. Verse 29 expresses the elder son's disapproval. The son omits any personal address to his father and begins immediately to reproach his father. In v. 30, the elder son avoids identifying his own relationship with this "other son" by not calling him "brother." The father speaks affectionately to the elder son in v. 31 by addressing him "son." Instead of making apologies for his actions towards the other son, the father is reproachful: "you ought to be glad and make merry, since it is 'your' brother who has come home."²⁴

This parable expresses in beautiful simplicity what God is like, His abounding love, His boundless grace, His goodness. He is joyful over the return of His lost ones, as the first part of the parable expresses. But the parable also expresses the protest of the elder son. That this second part is not an addition to an earlier story is argued by Jeremias by the fact that each half of the parable ends with the same logion.²⁵ Also, the pattern of the second part fits with the pattern of the first part without allegorizing or distorting it.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁵ Ibid.

The question of the parable must be raised. What is its intention? Why did Jesus add the second part? The answer suggested by Jeremias seems only too logical; that was the actual situation Jesus was facing. "The parable was addressed to men who were like the elder brother, men who were offended at the gospel."²⁶ Because the attitude of the elder brother cannot be ignored, but must be faced, an appeal is made to the conscience of these men, represented in the parable by the elder brother. "To them Jesus says: 'Behold the greatness of God's love for his lost children, and contrast it with your own joyless, loveless, thankless and self-righteous lives. Cease then from your loveless ways, and be merciful. The spiritually dead are rising to new life, the lost are returning home, rejoice with them.'"²⁷ The intention of the parable therefore is not a proclamation of the Good News to the poor, but a vindication of the Good News in reply to its critics. Jesus justifies his actions in having tablefellowship with the outcasts in pointing to the boundless love of God. But Jesus does not hold his position against them, thereby separating himself from them even more. He leaves them with the decision as to how they must act. That his listeners have been identified as being in the position of the elder brother is only too well felt. But now they must decide.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

By Jesus ending the parable where he does, he indicates his great hope of overcoming the resistance of the people opposed to the gospel. His hope is that they will also come to experience the great joy of the Good News of God's boundless love for their lives just as the sinners and outcasts have experienced. Jesus appeals to the very hearts of his critics.

E. THE PARABLE AS A TEACHING MEDIUM

Through the employment of the parable, Jesus reaches the conscience of his opponents. The parable becomes the vehicle of not only instructing his opponents concerning the gospel, but also confronting them to make their own decision concerning the gospel. The parable begins with where people are in their psychological world, their cognitive field, and builds upon that field. The parable then adds a new dimension to that field which the people had either not seen or felt before or which they had chosen to ignore, accepting therefore the more secure path of cultural acceptance over against the Good News. The situation is clear to everyone because they can identify with the story. The parable is about them. The conclusion is their conclusion; the judgment is upon them for immediate action. The action begins, of course, with their attitude, their acceptance or rejection of the message. The impact of the conclusion is increased over against a moral precept

through the interjection of the theological demand. In the case of the Parable of the Loving Father, the conclusion that the lost are found and the dead are alive implies that there is rejoicing in heaven. What benefit is there in not rejoicing with God over the repentance of his children? The answer, of course, is that there is no benefit. There is, however, a further separation between the critics and God in their not rejoicing. The opponents now become the lost ones who need repentance. Jesus' hope is that his opponents will experience the same joy of God's forgiveness in their repentance as the ones whom they have considered lost. The finger of theological criticism is turned, not toward those who reject their chosen heritage, repent, and experience God's forgiveness, but toward those who hear the gospel and do not repent. The parable bridges the gulf between Jesus and his opponents by placing everyone on the same theological plane before God, for God desires the repentance of each one of his children. To attempt debate or lecture would only further increase the separation between Jesus and the opponents.

The same vehicle of teaching the gospel is available to the pastor/teacher today. Through the process of either helping people to put themselves in the position of one of Jesus' listeners by carefully describing the "Sitz im Leben" of the parable, or by "modernizing" the parable, people today can experience the same impact in receiving

the theological message of forgiveness as people did at the time of Jesus.

How this is done will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE PASTOR AS TEACHER/EDUCATOR

A. INTRODUCTION

One of the roles of a pastor of a congregation is that of educator. How might the pastor serve most effectively as educator? The purpose of this chapter is to present a method by which the pastor of a local congregation can more effectively function as educator. Even though leading a congregation and individuals in a congregation in their growth as Christians is a difficult task, the gospel--the Good News of God's grace--can be presented so that individuals understand that message and are affirmed by it.

The problem posed in this dissertation has been directed toward this goal. Now that a useful educational theory has been presented, a theological justification of that theory developed, and the biblical message interpreted, the task now is to integrate this message and this theory in a way that will be useful to a person serving in the role of pastor in a local congregation.

B. THE PASTOR AS EDUCATOR

The commission of a pastor of a congregation is to present the demands of the gospel. His task includes the expropriation of the biblical message as well as interpreting that message in a vein relevant to the needs and concerns of his people. These concerns of a pastor require considerable skill development.

The pastor is in a unique position to see and know his congregation more personally than anyone else. If the pastor is in touch with his people, his knowledge of that congregation becomes priceless, in that no one else knows those particular people in the unique way he does. His response to their needs becomes extremely important. That someone else in time can also know that congregation as deeply as the pastor does not take away from the uniqueness of his role as pastor. It only means that, at this time in history, the person called to be pastor has the opportunity to understand in his own unique way the needs and concerns of these people called to be a congregation, and then to make an interpretation of those needs in light of the gospel.

One role of the pastor is that of educator. The way the pastor presents the material of the gospel message, the way the pastor understands the people whom he is teaching, and the way the pastor understands the interaction

among himself, others, and the world surrounding both, affects the growth of others and himself in light of that biblical message. This dissertation is concerned with the gospel being presented in its most effective manner. Cognitive field theory affords the pastor a useful medium for determining the manner of that presentation.

C. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE PASTOR/EDUCATOR

Cognitive field theory emphasizes the field of the learner. It is within this field that insights emerge. The pastor/educator must understand something about that field if he hopes to effect learning within his congregation. The dynamics of the field of the congregation and of each person participating emphasizes the changing nature of that field. People live, move, and have their being in relationship to that field. Through the interaction of people within this field, new problems are encountered, new concerns are developed, and new insights are gained which continue to increase the dynamic character of that field. Thus, the field of a person or of a congregation cannot be totally understood or completely grasped by another person at any given time. The field can only be partially appropriated. The degree of sensitivity the pastor brings to the dynamics of the field of his parishioners determines, to a large extent, his effectiveness as a pastor.

The importance of understanding the dynamics of the field of a congregation is felt when a particular method of teaching succeeds or fails. The goal is the understanding of the gospel. To achieve that goal, the educator/pastor must use a method that reflects the biblical material so that it relates to and becomes integrated with the content of the developing field of the congregation. The response to the gospel is part of each person's individual decision. But the presentation of the gospel must become part of their field. Have the people gained a clear understanding of the biblical message as it relates to their lives? The methodology of the pastor/educator affects their understanding.

Cognitive field theory assumes that learning takes place when a person gains an insight, sees clearly, or grasps an understanding of his or her life situation which he or she did not have before. This means that the learner already has many experiences to draw upon in relating himself or herself to the biblical material. The pastor/educator can therefore very effectively begin from where the learners are in their cognitive field and proceed from that point to give new data in helping them arrive at a new point of insight. The person in the pew says to himself or herself: "Ah, the pastor is speaking directly to me. What the pastor is speaking about is my life situation." Bringing together the biblical message with the person's

life situation brings a person to a point of insight. That a person can have an insight without the pastor/educator knowing goes without saying. Many insights occur in the solitude of the person's own life space. That some insights are shared with other people, including the pastor, affirms the very precious character of those important relationships.

The methodology would include beginning at a common starting point, such as reading the biblical material together as in the Scripture Reading in Worship, or reading the story or parable together in a small group setting. A point of contact between the story or parable and the people is sought. How does the story affect the people? What parts of the story do they understand, don't understand, disagree with, or agree with? Getting out in the open the points of contact which the people have with a particular story (such as on a blackboard or in discussion) is one way of affirming the cognitive field of each person present. Moving from the point of affirmation of the person's cognitive field to the affirmation of the person himself or herself usually becomes a relatively simple task. At this point, clarification of the story is in order. Have they understood the story? Do they have all the important information about the story before them? That some people will place more emphasis upon one aspect of a story than others simply illustrates the difference in values people

hold in their perceptual fields.

Once people have a grasp of the data of a particular story, an unusual teaching-learning situation is open to the pastor/educator. Many of the stories of the Bible sound strange to our modern ears. "Why did they do that?" becomes a common question, if not verbally, at least tacitly. The pastor/educator can then draw upon his role as a biblical scholar and present some of the material recent scholarship has discovered which helps people of the 20th century better understand the life of people in biblical times. That he does not have all the answers goes without saying. That he has been in touch with some of this material, at least to a greater degree than many laypersons, should also go without saying. Therefore, the pastor's task is to "fill in" some of the voids which automatically exist. Some of this form-critical data will often leave other questions unanswered. However, it is the arising of such unanswered questions that moves both the layperson and the scholar to continue the quest for a more thorough understanding of the biblical message.

What is the message of the story? It is at this point that people are led to hear the story or the parable the people of the first century heard, hopefully even as the people around Jesus heard it. It is also at this point that serious theological reflection takes place, if it hasn't taken place already. What message was this writer

or this story-teller communicating to those people around him? By identifying as much as possible with the people who first heard the story or the parable, people are led to hear more clearly the theological demand which God has for them today.¹

Jesus was opening the door of the Kingdom of God to the sinner, the lost, the lonely, the oppressed, and the outcast. He was also vindicating the gospel against those who opposed such openness. Through the dialogic process and the use of the parables, Jesus was, in effect, restructuring the cognitive field of those critical of his invitation of the Kingdom to the sinner. He was also leaving open the possibility of change in his critic's attitude, which in turn would leave open the possibility of change in their behavior: responding with joy to the lost sinner finding his way home to the Kingdom of God. Jesus was dealing with people who were separating themselves from others by way of their self-righteous attitude.

The situation of the local church is in many ways very similar to the situation with which Jesus was dealing. There are those people who feel that, because they have identified themselves with the church, they can place unnecessary or unusual demands upon others who feel outside of the institution. The people outside the church who are considered by the "in" group to be sinners and in need of

¹See Morris Bigge concerning learning in another field of study, Learning Theories for Teachers, pp. 216-218.

God's forgiveness are also seen as unworthy of God's love. The problem is of one group of people relating to another group who are seen as either religiously, ethnically, or economically different. By restructuring the field of awareness of the "in" group so that the points of division are seen as ethically untenable, then the possibilities of reconciliation and acceptance are made possible. By restructuring their cognitive field, a change of attitude becomes possible. Since attitude affects behavior, a more Christian loving response can take place. Role-play, simulation games, encounter groups and psychotherapy are techniques which can facilitate this process.

Opportunity must be provided which engage people in reflective dialogue. This dialogue within the context of the intimate group makes the experience of worship, preaching, and participation in the sacraments an articulate and functional part of their everyday life. Today's pastor/educator finds the small dialogic group, using a variety of involving techniques, perhaps his most effective teaching method. It is not simply a desire to modernize Jesus' teaching method to indicate the connection between today's group process and Jesus' own dialogic approach to persons. The parables were told as integral to dialogue as in the case of the young student of law who asked of Jesus how one inherited eternal life. Jesus engaged the young man in conversation and then, to effect insight, told the parable.

It is reasonable to believe that when he told the Parable of the Father's Love, the parable introduced in this study, he did so, again, in dialogic context. In today's intimate dialogue group, confronted by the gospel including especially the use of the parable, persons learn to listen to one another, learn to enter into the respective fields of one another, and thus deepen the insights into their common life and effect redemptive relationships. This serves to remove the tendency to casual and superficial talk about spiritual matters which too often characterizes church members. Through this process of interaction, persons may correct possible misunderstandings or round out their own self-understanding in relation to the gospel message. People are thus nurtured in a growth of personhood within the Christian community and experience the redemptive acts of God as He reveals Himself in the life of the church.

Field theory as explicated in the earlier chapters of this dissertation assumes a disciplined approach to learning and understanding and its impact upon personal growth. It is the group process as here briefly described, facilitated within the context of the Gospel, that presents the church with fresh opportunity for spiritual renewal.

D. SUMMARY

The concern of this dissertation is the growth and development of people, particularly those living within the context of the Christian community, in their continued interaction with God. It has been assumed that learning theory is an essential discipline in effecting this growth and development. Inasmuch as cognitive field theory is compatible with a theological position, i.e. God communicating with man through the revelatory event which requires response as insight, field theory becomes a major asset to the pastor/teacher. The use of field theory was illustrated by reviewing Jesus' use of the parable, recognized as an incomparable technique to effect insight understanding. That there were people, particularly those in positions of authority, who chose to reject the theological content of the parables told by Jesus does not lessen the value of their use today. The insight was there. The Pharisees did not choose to respond positively to what they discerned. And one must be prepared to experience a like rejection of the Good News. However, in the context of the group process and with the use of such dialogue techniques as described in the previous chapter, the pastor/educator is reinforced in his effort to effect insight and encourage a positive response. Essential to the process is the leader's ability to enter with discernment into the field

of one's people and they in turn learning to be perceptive of their own fields; this is aided by an interaction encouraging awareness of one another and willingness to listen to one's neighbor as each member of the group undertakes to speak with integrity out of his/her concerns as they articulate them in the light of the Gospel. An understanding of field theory thus becomes important to the pastor/educator who takes seriously the contribution of the teaching-learning disciplines.

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